


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

קדש..... *for Friday nights* שבת

Friday 19 December 2008 - 22 Kislev 5769
Sedra Vayeshev

STAYING ON THE SWING

MOST CHILDREN THRILL TO GO ON A SWING. IT IS CHALLENGING TO START OFF from the still position, and slowly build up momentum. Gradually the swing goes higher and higher. Watching the child swinging reveals an interesting point: in order to get really high on the up swing one must develop a really strong down swing. After reaching the lowest point, at which there is the greatest momentum and energy, one swings up to the highest point aloft.

It is one of the ironies of life that in order to swing to the greatest height it is necessary to plunge to the lowest point. It seems to be almost a law of nature that there is often a 'descent' in order to 'rise', a negative situation before the positive. In the Torah this principle is illustrated by the chain of events which begin in this week's Sedra¹: the descent of Joseph into Egypt and his subsequent rise to greatness.

In a tragic example of a breakdown of brotherly relationships Joseph was sold as a slave into Egypt. For thirteen years he suffered slavery, imprisonment and derision, but eventually ended up as the Viceroy of all Egypt. From this position he was able to save his family and thousands of others from starvation during the terrible years of famine².

This pattern is the key to the twin concepts of Exile and Redemption. The Divine promise of Redemption depicts an exalted state of being and consciousness for all humanity. However, somehow, in order to achieve this, there must also be the 'down' swing: the

bitterness and darkness of Exile.

Our problem is that sometimes a particularly unfortunate accident happens. For example, as the swing comes to its lowest point the person's foot might catch on something and he or she is thrown out of their seat. In other words, the Exile can suddenly become so difficult that many people lose hope. After the Holocaust there was widespread despair about the future of Judaism, especially as regards traditional observance and knowledge. Miraculously, despite these fears there has been a wonderful rejuvenation of Jewish scholarship and traditional life. Jewish knowledge and Jewish observance, in Israel and elsewhere, has moved into a happy, joyful upward swing.

In the life of an individual or of a community there can be comparable jarring events which threaten to shake the person from his or her seat. Gradually, one comes to terms with the new situation, and makes a step forward. The challenge is to keep sitting firmly on the swing, holding on tight³ as it goes through what seems like the lowest point, with faith in G-d that soon it will reach exalted heights.

The Chanukah festival which begins on Sunday evening also expresses this pattern. The Jewish people had reached the depths in terms of assimilation to Greek culture and idolatry. This process began as something voluntary among wealthy Jews and then became enforced by government decree on everyone. The sacred Temple was defiled and Jewish study and observance were banned.

It was the lowest point on the swing. Then, in a miraculous way the Macabbees gathered together, conquered the Syrian-Greek troops, and restored the Temple. When they lit the golden Menorah, although they had only one day's supply of oil, miraculously it stayed alight for eight days, heralding a nationwide return to Judaism. Thus again the swing soared upwards.

Whatever happens, hold on tight!

1. Genesis chs.37-40. 2. Joseph himself understood his being sold into slavery as a necessary prelude to his work as a provider for others. See Gen.45:5-8. 3. This is the quality of 'Netzach', determination to succeed and to hold on, in all aspects of life. See Tanya Part 4, ch.15, 122b, and *Likkutei Torah*, Mas'ey 90d.

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SEDRA VAYESHEV – CHANUKAH

NEW SCHNITZEL

Mrs Cohen was not feeling well and had been in bed for a few days so Ben and David decided they would try to do a Mitzvah and help their mother by cooking for Shabbat.

Of course they weren't yet allowed to cook in the kitchen by themselves, but they had the supervision of their older sister. They promised they would be very careful so that they would avoid making a terrible mess or do anything dangerous.

"Ok" Rachel their older sister said, "I have a big test tomorrow so I need to do some homework, but if you need anything then just ask and I'll tell you where it is or how to do it".

Ben and David wasted no time and quickly got to work.

"Wow" David said, wiping his brow after a half hour of bashing flat the pieces of chicken before putting them in egg-white and bread crumbs, ready for frying.

"Look Ben," he said "do you see how the pieces change colour as they fry?"

Ben came over to look at the frying pieces of chicken.

"It's funny," Ben said, "I never thought that it took so much effort to make food".

"Yes," David said in agreement. "When mummy cooks it, we just think that the food made itself, and all you have to do is

show up for supper time and there it is".

The pan sizzled and crackled as the boys contemplated the pieces of chicken which were slowly turning from a soft pink colour to white, and then to crispy brown.

"Could you imagine," Ben said "this used to be a chicken.."

"Thanks" David said. "Now I'm really looking forward to eating it!"

"I'm serious," Ben said "It's as if the schnitzel is a new thing that never existed before". "Hmm" David said. "Where did it come from?" he wondered aloud.

"It's a bit like the Chanukah lights" Ben said. "We take a wick and some oil, or wax candles, and we start to burn them. And then, the strangest thing happens..."

"What?" asked David.

"The burning flame on the wick becomes a Mitzvah, something holy and special".

"You mean it wasn't special before?" David asked.

"No" Ben said. "Before you said the blessings and lit the flame, there was just a wick and oil, or a candle, and now it becomes something new: the Chanukah lights".

"You mean," said David, "because we use it for the Chanukah lights, it becomes part of a Mitzvah which is something new thing and something special? Like the schnitzel is something new?"

"Well, more than that. More even than a latke. Hey, let's ask Rachel if we can also make some latkes..."

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